

Washington, DC - Congresswoman Linda Sánchez (CA -39) today announced that she will visit the tsunami-ravaged region of Sri Lanka from January 16th - 18th. She is traveling as part of an official Congressional delegation to see first hand the damage and work of aid groups like UNFPA, the United Nations Population Fund, and other UN partners.

“This tsunami was a terrible natural disaster, and it is important for members of Congress to see first hand what actually needs to be done to help this region. Assessing the damage will give us a better understanding of the specific needs of women, many of whom have instantly become the head of their households,” said Congresswoman Linda Sánchez.

In Sri Lanka, Sánchez will travel to Colombo, one of the hardest-hit areas in the region, where she plans to do an in-depth examination of current relief efforts, tour the damage, meet with Sri Lanka officials, and the American Ambassador. She will also visit Galle, a tourist area that was destroyed during the tsunami. The United Nations Foundation (UNFPA), which is sponsoring the trip, will also brief Sánchez on their efforts to help women.

UNFPA has been on the front lines supporting women whom, in many ways, have been disproportionately affected by the disaster. For example, women are uniquely vulnerable to poor nutrition, which frequently occurs after natural disasters when food supplies are unavailable or uneven. Vitamin and iron deficiencies, especially anemia, can be fatal for pregnant women and their babies. Women can also suffer a wide range of reproductive health-related vulnerabilities, from not having sanitary supplies to life-threatening complications related to pregnancy.

“As a result of this disaster many women will have to take on new responsibilities including becoming the breadwinner for their families, and in many instances being the only caretaker for children, the injured, sick, and elderly. This can cause physical and mental health implications that are often overlooked. It is critical that women receive both financial and physiological support to help them rebuild their lives,” said Sánchez.

As one of the hardest hit countries by the recent tsunami, Sri Lanka has suffered the loss of more than 30,000 lives with 860,000 people displaced. To date, the United States has committed \$350 million in financial support and approximately 12,600 military personnel to the region.

“The U.S. has made a good start by committing resources and personnel, but this needs to be an ongoing commitment. At this point we need to follow through and make sure that the aid is reaching women and families who need it the most,” concluded Sánchez.

Congresswoman Sánchez is traveling with a delegation that includes Representatives Joseph Crowley (NY-7), Sheila Jackson-Lee (TX-18), Steve Israel (NY-2), and Al Green (TX-9). No member of the delegation has previously visited Sri Lanka.